

LINCOLN
THE COMFORTER

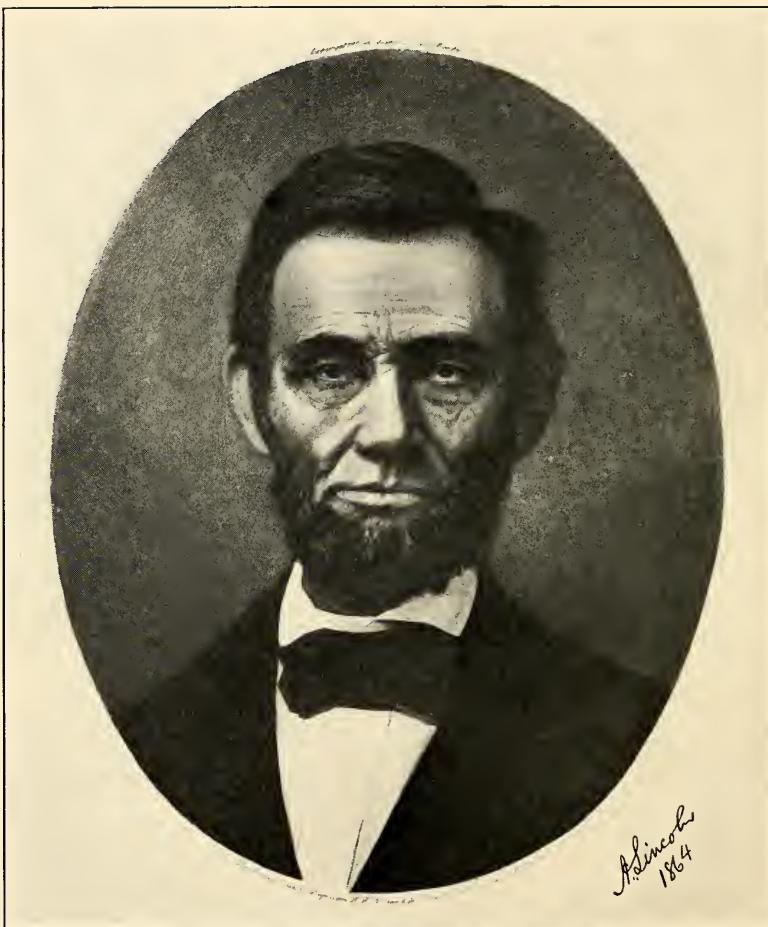
To the Hon. Daniel Fish
With the cordial
esteem of the compiler
Chas. T. White

Jan. 22, 1917.

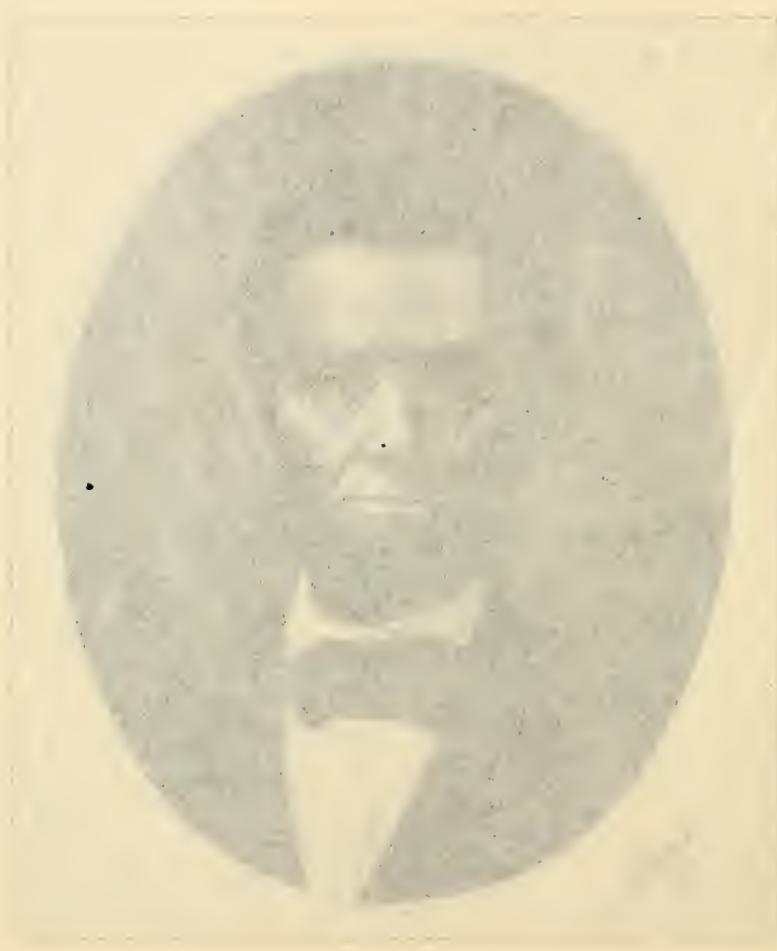


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Abraham
1864



LINCOLN

the

COMFORTER

Together with a Story of
Lincoln's First Pet, and a Narrative
by Captain Gilbert J. Greene.

COMPILED BY CHAS. T. WHITE.

PRIVATELY PRINTED
HANCOCK, N. Y.
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Introduction.

Believing that the two Lincoln stories and the personal narrative by the late Captain Gilbert J. Greene included in this brief volume are worthy of a permanent place in Lincolniana, the compiler has verified them in every important detail.

The story of Lincoln as comforter of a dying Christian woman was obtained from Captain Greene by the Rev. Dr. F. C. Iglehart of the Methodist Church, at present a staff writer of "The Christian Herald." The story appeared in "The Christian Herald," whose publishers sanction the use of it here.

The narrative by Captain Greene first appeared in "The Atlanta Constitution,"

in 1889. Mr. Clark Howell, publisher, kindly permits publication here.

The compiler's thanks are due to Mrs. Emily Clark Greene, of Highland Mills, N. Y., widow of Captain Greene, for assistance in gathering and verifying data, and for the use of the portrait of Captain Greene.

Mr. Herbert W. Wagner, publisher of "The Hancock Herald," an old friend, graciously "loaned" his printing plant, and the compiler had the pleasure of setting the type for this pamphlet in the office where thirty-five years ago he completed his printing trade apprenticeship.

In the judgment of the compiler few stories about Lincoln more fully grip the "imagination of the heart" than the ones given here.

C. T. W.



Lincoln the Comforter.

Captain Gilbert J. Greene, the original narrator of the story which follows, was a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln from the winter of 1850-51 to the close of the President's career. As related in another part of this volume, circumstances of a peculiar character combined to establish very sympathetic relations between Lincoln and young Greene.

Briefly, these incidents were that Greene through fear of personal violence, because in a young peoples' debating society he took strong grounds against Slavery as an institution, hurriedly left Jackson, Tenn. Leaving Cairo, Ill., in midwinter, he walked nearly the entire distance

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of 700-odd miles across Illinois to his home at the northern border of the State. Jacob Straus, a farmer-client of Lincoln's, living at Jacksonville, 35 miles from Springfield, entertained Greene over night, exacting as compensation that he agree to deliver to Lincoln the following day a package of legal papers. After the delivery of the papers Lincoln got from young Greene the story of his career—his early struggle when his mother was left a widow with a large family; his printing-office apprenticeship in Goshen, N. Y.; his work as a journeyman printer on "The New York Tribune;" his brief service on a Mississippi River steamer; his tutoring of a planter's children at Jackson, culminating with threatened violence that caused Greene to flee the neighborhood, scantily clad and meagerly supplied with money.

As Lincoln drew the story from the boy his heart glowed with sympathy.

Like the Good Samaritan, he comforted him; he sent him to an inn and told the landlord to take good care of him, and charge the bill to him—Lincoln.

From boyhood Abraham Lincoln was a comfort to people. They loved to have him around. They gathered where he tarried. Ofttimes without appreciating what it was, people sought the sunshine of his soul, and were better from even a brief contact with him. Captain Greene, then a boy of 18, seemed to have his regard as few men, young or old, had it.

In this little book emphasis is laid on the comforting quality of Abraham Lincoln's character, because, in the judgment of the writer, this particular characteristic of Lincoln is brought out with beautiful distinctness in the incident witnessed by Gilbert Greene, the young Springfield printer, and told many times by him.

* * * *

“Greene,” said Lincoln to him one

day on the streets of Springfield, "I've got to ride out into the country to-morrow to draw a will for a woman who is believed to be on her deathbed. I may want you for a witness. If you haven't anything else to do I'd like to have you go along."

The invitation was promptly accepted.

On the way to the farmhouse the lawyer and the printer chatted delightfully, cementing a friendship that was fast ripening into real affection. Arriving at the house, the woman was found to be near her end.

With great gentleness Lincoln drew up the document disposing of the property as the woman desired. Neighbors and relatives were present, making it unnecessary to call on Greene to witness the instrument. After the signing and witnessing of the will the woman turned to Lincoln and said, with a smile:

"Now I have my affairs for this world arranged satisfactorily. I am thankful

to say that long before this I have made preparation for the other life I am so soon to enter. Many years ago I sought and found Christ as my Saviour. He has been my stay and comfort through the years, and is now near to carry me over the river of death. I do not fear death, Mr. Lincoln. I am really glad that my time has come, for loved ones have gone before me and I rejoice in the hope of meeting them so soon."

Instinctively the friends drew nearer the bedside. As the dying woman had addressed her words more directly to Lincoln than to the others, Lincoln, evincing sympathy in every look and gesture, bent toward her and said:

"Your faith in Christ is wise and strong; your hope of a future life is blessed. You are to be congratulated on passing through life so usefully, and into the life beyond so hopefully."

"Mr. Lincoln," said she, "won't you

read a few verses out of the Bible for me?"

A member of the family offered him the family Bible. Instead of taking it, he began reciting from memory the twenty-third Psalm, laying emphasis upon "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Still without referring to the Bible, Lincoln began with the first part of the fourteenth chapter of John—

"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.

"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

After he had given these and other quotations from the Scriptures, he recited

various familiar comforting hymns, closing with "Rock of Ages," cleft for me." Then, with a tenderness and pathos that enthralled everyone in the room, he spoke the last stanza—

"While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

While Lincoln was reciting this stanza a look of peace and resignation lit up the countenance of the dying woman. In a few minutes more, while the lawyer and printer were there, she passed away.

The journey back to Springfield was begun in silence. It was the younger man who finally said:

"Mr. Lincoln, ever since what has just happened back there in that farmhouse, I have been thinking that it is very extraordinary that you should so perfectly have acted as pastor as well as attorney."

When the answer to this suggestion finally was given,—and it was not given at once—Lincoln said:

“God, and Eternity, and Heaven were very near to me to-day.”



Lincoln's First Pet.

Abraham Lincoln asked Gilbert J. Greene to take a walk with him into the country. It was in the late "fifties," while Greene was a journeyman printer in Springfield, and when the fame of Lincoln throughout the State was steadily rising. Greene was only too eager to accept the invitation. He already had recognized the greatness of the character of Lincoln. A walk and talk with Lincoln meant a widening of mental horizon. It was a moonlight night. Everything was quiet along the country road. Suddenly the strollers came up to six little pigs with their noses close together.

"Those little pigs are lost," said Lin-

coln, after briefly surveying them, "let's help them to find their mother."

With little-pig grunts and snorts, the six were soon scampering down the road. At length they found a hole in the fence and their mother in the field, a rod away. Lincoln smiled with satisfaction as he saw the pig family reunited, and remarked:

"I never see a pig that I do not think of my first pet. When a boy, six years old, while we lived near Hodgenville, Ky., I went over to a neighboring farm. A litter of striped piggies had just been born, and I was so taken with them that they could not get me away from them. The owner filled me with supreme joy by saying: 'You may have one of those pigs if you can get him home.' I instantly accepted the offer. I had on a tow shirt—one which my mother had woven—reaching below my knees, and fastened at the neck by a wooden button my father had made. Using the front of it as an apron, or sack, I rolled my pig up in it

and carried him home. I got an old bee-gum,—a hollow log—put cornhusks and leaves into it for a bed, and tucked him away for the night. He squealed for his mother nearly all night. In the morning I carried him meal and bran, and bread and milk—everything I could think of—but he would not touch any of them. About all he could do was to squeal. At length my mother said to me:

“‘Abe, take that pig back home; it will die if you keep it here.’

“What my mother said was always the truth and the law to me, and, though it almost broke my heart, I took the pig back. His mother was so glad to see him, and he to see her! After she had given him his dinner, he looked so pretty I could not stand it, and I begged the man to let me take him back. I put him in my tow shirt, as I had before, and took him to our house. Mother protested, and I cried; she broke down and relented, and said I might try him one day more. He

would not eat a thing I brought him, and mother sent me back with him again. I carried him back and forth to his meals for two weeks, until we taught him to eat, and he was mine for good.

“That pig,” continued Lincoln, his eyes brightening with the recollection, “was my companion. I played with him, and taught him tricks. We used to play hide-and-seek. I can see his little face now, peeking around the corner of the house, to see whether I was coming after him !

“After awhile he got too heavy for me to carry around, and then he followed me everywhere—to the barn, to the plowed ground, and to the woods. Many a day I spent in the woods, brushing the leaves away, picking out the most promising spots, helping him to find acorns and nuts. Sometimes he would have a lazy spell. Then he would rub against my legs, and stop in front of me, and lie down in a sort of wheedling way, and say.

in the language which I understood, ‘Abe, why don’t you carry me, the same as you used to do?’

“When he grew larger,” continued Lincoln, with a hearty laugh, “I turned the tables on him, and made him carry me ; and he did it just as happily and cheerfully as I ever performed the same service for him. Father fed him corn-piles of it—and how he did eat! He grew large—too large for his own good and mine. There was talk around the house of the hog being about fat enough to kill. At the table one day I heard father say he was going to kill the hog the next day. My heart was as heavy as lead.

“The next morning was the beginning of a tragedy to me. There were ominous signs everywhere. There was a heavy pole resting on crotched posts near the barn. Father had a barrel of water ready, and was heating the stones that were to be thrown into it to make hot water for the scalding. I was suddenly seized with

a determination to save my playmate. I slipped out and took him with me into the woods. When father found what had happened he yelled as loud as he could:

“‘You, Abe, fetch back that hog! You, Abe, fetch back that hog !’

“The louder father called, the further and faster we went, till we were out of hearing of the voice. We stayed in the woods till night. On returning I was severely scolded. Father and mother explained to me that we could not keep the hog through the winter for me to play with—that hogs were meant to be killed for food. I was not convinced. After a restless night I rose early and slipped out of the house quietly, to get my pig and take him away for another day’s hiding. But my father had forestalled me by rising still earlier, and he had fastened my pet in the pen.

“I knew then,” continued Lincoln, as the two men halted momentarily, “there was no hope for my pig. I did not eat

any breakfast, but started for the woods. I had not got far into the woods before I heard the pig squeal, and I ran faster than ever to get away from the sound.

“Being quite hungry at midday, I started for home. Reaching the edge of the clearing, I saw the hog, dressed, hanging from the pole near the barn. I began to blubber. I just couldn’t reconcile myself to my loss. I could not stand it, and went far back into the woods again, where I found some nuts that satisfied my hunger till night, when I returned home.

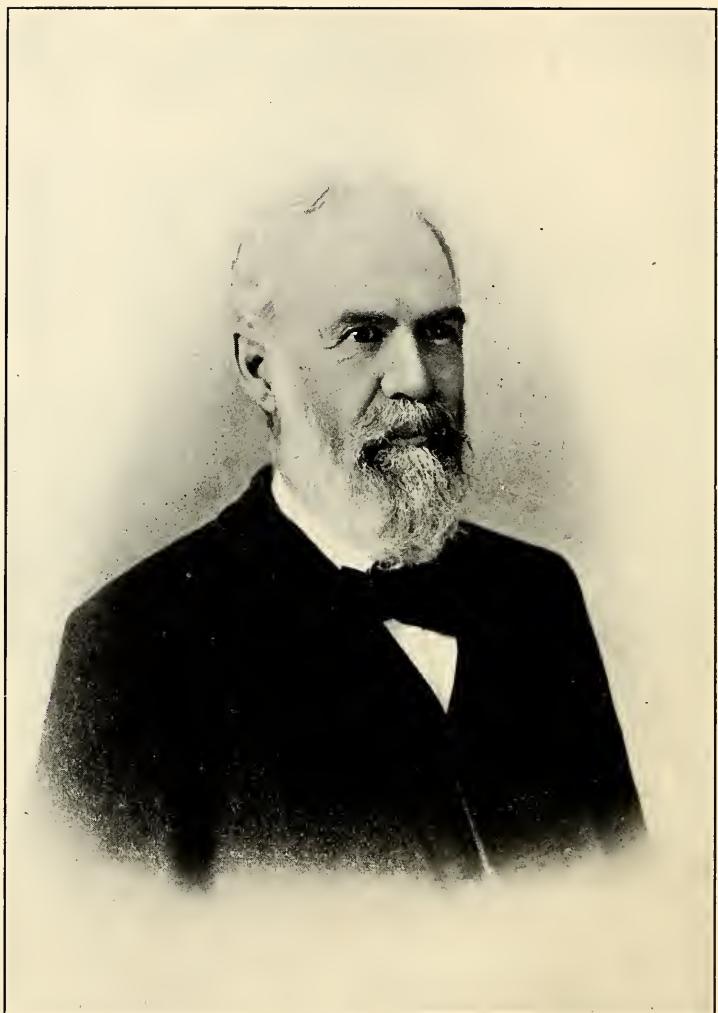
“They could not get me to take any of the meat; neither tenderloin, nor sausage, nor souse; and even months after, when the cured ham came on the table, it made me sad and sick to look at it.

“The next morning,” continued Lincoln, “I went into the yard and saw some of the reminders of the butchering. Taking a big chip, I scraped the scattered blood and hair into a pile and burned it up. Then I found some soft dirt which I

carried in the fold of my tow shirt, and strewed it over the ground, to cover up every trace of what was to me an awful tragedy. The new dirt did not do its work very well," said the speaker, smiling somewhat sadly, "for to this day, whenever I see a pig like the little fellows we just met in the road—it all comes back to me—my pet pig, our rambles in the woods, the scenes of my boyhood, the old home and the dear ones there."

In commenting on this walk and talk with Lincoln, Captain Greene said:

"It gave me a clearer insight into the great heart of Lincoln than years of close association could have done. He had a wonderful kindness of heart. He could not help being tender any more than the song birds about his cabin could keep from singing. It was easy, even then, for me to see how the boy, so tender to his first pet, might grow to be perhaps the very greatest and noblest American gentleman."



CAPTAIN GILBERT J. GREENE

Abraham Lincoln as I Saw Him.

BY GILBERT J. GREENE.*

To intimately know a great man is a privilege, because great men are rare, and their intimates are not often numerous, and they seldom have time or inclination to give thought or attention to those whose sphere of life is far removed from their own. As it was my privilege to know

* Gilbert J. Greene was born in Ramapo, N.Y., April 27, 1833. He died at Highland Mills, N. Y., December 12, 1906. When five years old his father died, leaving his mother with thirteen children. In early boyhood he entered a printing office at Goshen, N. Y. From there he went to New York, and became a compositor on the Tribune. Drifting west, he became a clerk on a Mississippi River boat. At the breaking out of the war he volunteered on the first call, raised a company at Tarrytown, N. Y., and went out as First Lieutenant. He was attached to the 49th N. Y. Regiment. Lincoln made him Marshal of Winchester, and later a dispatch carrier for Grant and others. After the war he engaged in business in the South. His last years were spent in Orange County, N. Y. He was a good writer and speaker, and highly esteemed.

Abraham Lincoln quite well some years before his countrymen recognized his ability, or demanded his services, it may be taken as sufficient warrant for relating the circumstance that made us acquainted. Although I have known Mr. Lincoln to laugh, and to raise a laugh, in relating it, yet even now, after a lapse of nearly half a century, it appears as a very serious matter to me. It is needless, therefore, to wait, hoping that it might assume a more pleasant aspect; but if the world can take a cheerful view of it, I am sure, considering all that has followed, I ought not to complain.

In the summer and fall of 1850 I was second clerk on a Mississippi steamboat plying between St. Louis and New Orleans. On the down trip in October were a gentleman and his family who had been spending the summer at the North. They lived near Jackson, Tenn., where they had a large plantation. They were old friends of the captain of the boat. They desired

to engage a teacher for their children, to make one of their family until they went north the following year.

This looked like pleasant employment. The captain recommended me as a competent person, and I accepted the situation, agreeing to meet a member of the family at Memphis on the return trip of the boat from New Orleans. This I did, and found everything quite as good as I had reason to expect.

I soon made the acquaintance of the young people of the neighborhood, and entered into the various amusements common to them. Perhaps I added to the general fund, having seen more of the world, and mingled somewhat in society.

The inevitable debating society of that period held forth in a neighboring school-house. I was quite as ready then as now to argue either side of any question that needed defenders, as my bump of egotism was well developed at that early day. I well remember I was rather sought after

by the advocates of questions that were weak or unpopular.

The absorbing slavery question was not long in being brought to the front. Having spent some years in a Free Soil printing office, I probably was more familiar with the question than my opponents suspected, and doubtless brought arguments against the institution they had never heard and were quite unable to answer.

The discussion of Slavery continued for a number of evenings, and the old school house always was full. Considering the time and circumstances, I doubtless was very indiscreet. I was not employed for the purpose of discussing the question. Looking back over all these long years to the occurrence as it now appears to me, I cannot think that the threats and violence of a whole community were justified or necessary, or in any sense an answer to the arguments of a beardless boy.

Repeated threats had been made, to

which I gave no heed, and violence attempted which I had been able to repel. Another meeting was appointed for a few nights before Christmas. The warnings to keep away made me the more determined to be present. A riot ensued, as had doubtless been prearranged, and I was obliged to fly for safety. The road to my residence was patrolled by armed men, and I could not approach it to procure aid, or even so much as to get an overcoat.

I had a small sum of money. My first thought was to go to Memphis, hoping to intercept the boat on which I had been employed, either on up or down trip. The weather was very cold and bad. I got to Memphis only to find that the steamer was laid up in New Orleans with a broken shaft, and would not make a trip for several weeks. The only boat going up the river was an Ohio River boat. In my anxiety to get away I took passage on it to Cairo, and arrived there to find both

the Mississippi and the Ohio frozen over and all navigation suspended.

My home was in the extreme northern end of the State of Illinois, within five miles of the Wisconsin line—over 700 miles from Cairo at the mouth of the Ohio River. There was no railroad at that time in that part of Illinois, or any that ran in that direction. I was determined, however, to go home. The weather was uncommonly cold. I was scantily clad, and had but a few dollars in money. The distance was very great. After thinking the matter over for a day or two, I set out upon the journey, and never faltered for an hour, finally reaching my own pleasant home on the banks of the Rock River.

It was a terrible experience. I was a mere boy, unused to much physical exertion. My money gave out before half the trip was over. To many hardships, hunger, too, was often added.

The long, depressing journey was illumined by a single incident that to my

mind amply compensates me for all the suffering I endured. I made upon this journey the acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln !

Just how it occurred furnishes the motive for this sketch. Although nearly half a century has passed away, I feel in relating it somewhat the ardor of the old soldier, who in congenial company loves to fight his battles over again.

As I approached the middle of the State, after walking an entire day through cornfields, I applied at nightfall at a large farmhouse for shelter. I soon learned that it was the home of Jacob Strause, at that time the largest farmer in the West, owning more than 40,000 acres of land, and producing nothing but corn and beef. Finding that my route carried me to Springfield, the capital of the State, just 35 miles due north, Strause told me he would keep me over night if I would carry some papers to a lawyer there next day.

After supper, sitting around a great

fire composed entirely of corncobs, he said he had some papers to send to "Abe" Lincoln, who attended to all his legal business.

"Don't know him? Well, anybody in Springfield can tell you where his office is —up by the court house. He's just the smartest lawyer there is in this State, and he would be Governor yet if it wasn't for his infernal politics," said Strause.

The old fellow was loud in his praise of "Abe" Lincoln, but was clearly of the opinion that his "infernal politics" would keep him from ever amounting to anything. He related a number of anecdotes to show how much smarter was Lincoln than some other lawyers whom he had employed to do his legal business.

I started the next morning at sunrise. The distance to Springfield was 35 miles, the road exactly straight, and the country so level I could see the sun reflected from the State House dome. It was very cold, but clear. The snow was about four

inches deep, as dry as powder, and it slipped under the feet like sand. Since then I have walked some long distances; I saw some heavy marching during the war, but no single day's journey ever exceeded the wearisome monotony of this long, level road. I arrived in the city before nightfall. The first man I asked (he chanced to be cutting wood by the roadside), said in answer to my inquiry:

“You will find ‘Abe’ Lincoln’s office on the west side of Court House Square, in the only building that ain’t got any paint on it.”

And so I did. The entrance was in a hallway.

“A. LINCOLN, ATTORNEY,”

was on a plain strip of black tin on a door to the left. I knocked, and a loud, cheerful voice instantly responded, “Come in !” I timidly opened the door and entering I observed a man sitting in an old-fashioned splint-bottomed chair before a blazing wood fire, his feet against the

mantel higher than his head, and reading a copy of "The Louisville Journal." He never looked up, but as I advanced towards the fire, which at the moment attracted me more than the man, he said:

"Well?"

"I have some papers here which I brought from Jacob Strause, near Jacksonville," was my reply.

Down came the feet and up went the head, and as he took the bundle he said:

"Didn't think the old codger would send a horse out such a night as this."

When I told him I had walked the entire distance his interest in me became so great that he never stopped questioning me until I had told him my whole story.

As he rose from his chair he seemed to undouble like a pocket rule, his legs and arms disproportionately long, his hair disheveled, his clothing seedy, and his general appearance quite unprepossessing. But he had not talked to me ten minutes in his quiet, sympathetic way before I

thought him about the handsomest man I had ever seen. I had just finished the hardest day's labor of my life. I entered his office half-frozen and half-starved. He did not even ask me to sit down, nor did he sit down himself, yet I grew warm and cheerful in his presence, forgetting my great hunger and fatigue. The tears I unconsciously shed were but an honest tribute to his kindness and sympathy.

He manifested great interest in my adventure, and discussed the slavery question from standpoints that were quite new to me. He condemned the system on moral, political and financial grounds, but it was hard for me to tell for whom he had the greater sympathy, the slave or his master.

“Slavery,” Lincoln said, “exists only by the tolerance of Christian people, but its advocates are determined that Christianity shall not only tolerate but approve it.”

Continuing, he said it was a conflict

that could not last forever, and it could have but one ending. It must cease to exist. If during the last twenty years its advocates had held an annual convention to determine upon something they would do in the following year to annoy or incense their opponents, they would have proposed about what they had done, and if it were continued, as it had been in the past, there were plenty of people then living who would see the end of human slavery. He said he was quite sure it would not outlive the century. It seemed to him that gradual emancipation, and governmental compensation, would bring it to an end.

Finding that I had no money, he took \$5 from his pocket, saying:

“Take this. I will charge it up to that old codger, as he had to send the papers to-day, and it is worth ten dollars to bring them in such weather.”

Taking up the newspaper he had laid

down, he wrote on the white margin in a line eighteen inches long:

“Mr. Wilson: Take care of this boy until to-morrow, or longer if the weather is bad, and send the bill to me.

A. LINCOLN.

Tearing this off and handing it to me, he pointed out of the window to a hotel across the square, and told me to go there and remain until I was able to resume my journey; that he was glad of the opportunity to do me a favor, and would be more than glad if in the future he should know that I was prosperous and happy.

As I stepped out into the snow and turned my back on that friendly face I little thought I had made the acquaintance of the one great figure that would illumine the pages of American history in the 19th century.

I thought he was the greatest man I had ever seen. His was the first friendly greeting I had received, after weeks of exceptional toil and privation. I trust I

would have appreciated such kindness at its true value coming from anyone, but there was something about this man so impressive that I passed out of his sight with the conviction that I had met a great man.

Three weeks afterward I met, at Rockford, Mr. Elihu Washburne, the Congressman from the northern district of Illinois, and who afterward became the distinguished friend of both Lincoln and Grant. I related to him this occurrence, and ended it with the observation that I regarded Lincoln as a great man. Mr. Washburne replied:

“Well, yes; Mr. Lincoln is an able man, and he possesses in a large degree the elements of true greatness, but his excessive modesty and diffidence will keep him in the background, while others, with less fitness or ability, will push themselves to the front.”

I was well cared for at the hotel, and the next day, the weather being very

pleasant, I set out to finish my tedious journey. As I was leaving the hotel a man brought me a note from Mr. Lincoln, the messenger explaining that it might be of some use to me when I reached Peoria, a town farther north, on the Illinois River. It was addressed to a business man in the town, and ran as follows:

Mr. Wallace, Peoria: Dear Sir: This boy wants to reach the Rock River country somewhere near Beloit. If he needs any assistance so you can help him in any way, it will be appreciated, and I will be responsible. Yours, A. LINCOLN.

I did not meet the gentleman to whom the note was addressed, as he was not at home, and it was quite as well, as I did not need any assistance, for twenty years afterward I sold the dingy note for \$20.

I reached my home in due time, having walked about 800 miles in thirty days. It is but proper to add, and I take pleasure in so doing, that I found a letter from the gentleman by whom I had been

employed deplored the occurrence which forced my leaving, and assuring me of his sympathy, inclosing all and more than was really due me.



